

ESTABLISHED WORK**NO. 3142****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 29, 1909****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON****ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 20, 1873***“Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”**Psalm 90:17*

SOME of us have been to the grave this afternoon and the most forcible impression upon our minds at this time is that of our mortality. We cannot, in burying others, say, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” without thinking of the time when we too shall be laid in the silent grave. The thought that we are, yet are not, that we are but as shadows that flit across the path of life—coming, going, scarcely come ere we are gone—the thought of our mortality has led us to ask concerning our work—Is that mortal too? Will that die like ourselves?

Some of us have darling objects, high designs, great enterprises on our hearts—are all those shadows? We are as the grass of the field—are they also grass? Will the scythe that cuts us down cut them down too? Truly, if we thought it would be so, it would give double bitterness to the remembrance of our own mortality to think that our work was mortal as well as ourselves.

Perhaps it was that feeling which led Moses, the great prophet-poet of the wilderness, to cry, “If we die, if we pass away, yet ‘establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.’” Every good man, who is doing a good work, has a sincere desire that his work should continue. This is not a wrong desire—it is in the highest degree right.

We wish not to build with wood, hay, and stubble—which we know will be consumed—and if our work is of that kind, we must not pray for its continuance. But if we believe that we are building with gold, silver, and precious stones, we may pray, for the prayer is a right one, and the thought that suggests the prayer is a right one, “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”

At the same time, let me here remark that it is the work of God which is the ground of our confidence and peace, but our own work—even that which we dare ask God to establish—can never be such a comfort and stay to us, for it is always a cause of anxiety. It is a very strange thing that unconverted men should ever look to their own works for peace and comfort, since even to Christians their own works are rather a source of anxiety than of consolation. I feel sure that every true worker for God knows that it is so.

The more you do for God, the more care you have pressing upon you. And though grace enables you to cast that care upon Him whose work it really is, yet still care does naturally arise out of all work for God to those who are truly concerned in it. Hence our works never can become the source of our truest consolation. They may become evidences to us of God’s presence with us and may yield to our conscience a measure of peace, but still, the anxiety which will always spring out of good works will counterbalance any sort of comfort that can come from them.

It is to God’s work, not our own, that we have to look, “‘Let *thy* work appear unto thy servants.’ We are willing to work for You, Lord, but let us always have our eye on Your work. We shall never serve You acceptably unless our eye is directed towards what You have done for us rather than towards what we do for You. There is no glory in *our* work, but ‘let *thy* work appear unto thy servants, and *thy* glory,’ which always goes with it, ‘unto their children.’ Let us see Your glorious work, Your finished work—let us see it always, let us see it living, let us see it dying, and so we, Your servants, will praise You even

when our hearts are anxious, believing that You will remove our anxiety—‘Let thy work appear unto thy servants...and establish the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.’”

I am going to try to answer three questions concerning our work for God. First, *what part of our work can we ask God to establish?* Secondly, *in what way is He likely to establish it?* And thirdly, if we are praying as Moses did, *what ought to be our mode of action to correspond with such a prayer?*

I. First, then, WHAT KIND OF WORK CAN WE ASK GOD TO ESTABLISH?

The ungodly must not pray, “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us”—it would be blasphemy for them to do so. If the work be evil, God cannot establish it. Jesus Christ has been revealed to destroy all the works of the devil—and when He is destroying the works of the devil, He will destroy all the works that have been wrought by men possessed by the spirit of evil. Nothing that has been wrought unrighteously will be allowed to stand, neither can we ask God to make it stand without supposing God to be such a one as ourselves, which He is not, and can never be. God will not help you in that which is wrong, ungodly man, however much you may try to interweave His holy name with your unrighteous actions.

And remember, too, that God will never establish our works if they are intended to rival the works of His Son. Some people work very hard in trying to make a righteousness of their own, but if they could achieve their purpose, they would then be independent of a Savior. Their attempted obedience to the law of God is intended to be a substitute for the perfect righteousness of Christ—and their tears and repentances are intended to be a substitute for the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

But do you suppose that God will ever take the side of those who would fain rival His Son and make the work of His Son needless? That can never be! Self-righteousness is the direst of insults to the Son of God. If I conceive myself to be righteous and meritorious in God’s sight, I do, as far as in me lies, cast a reflection upon the wisdom of God, for I tell Him that, although He provided a Savior, one was not needed—at any rate for me.

I also insult the blood of Jesus, for I tell Him that it was shed unnecessarily—at least as far as I am concerned—for I have no sin needing to be washed away. I insult the Holy Ghost too, for I tell Him that I do not need a new birth, for I am already as good as I need to be. Self-righteousness insults the Triune JEHOVAH and therefore we cannot ask God to establish it.

If we were sensible, we should pray God to pull it down, every stick and stone of it. And rest assured, sinners, that if God ever does save you, He will do that as one of the first things—for every stone that our fancied nobility has ever put upon its fellow with a view to building a refuge for ourselves, God will take down. Not one stone shall be left upon another if God is ever to save us.

One of the most deplorable things that could ever happen to a man would be for him to be allowed to dwell comfortably in a refuge of lies until the storm of divine judgment should sweep both himself and his refuge away forever. Dear hearer, may I ask whether your work is a self-righteous one, whether you are trying to save yourself? For if so, this prayer of Moses cannot properly be used by you, neither can God hear it with acceptance. No wicked works and no self-righteous works may we ask God to establish.

But may we ask God to establish the ordinary works and engagements of our daily life? Yes, assuredly, we may. If you are a servant of God, you have learned to eat and drink to His glory, and your most common actions are a part of the holy priesthood to which all believers are called. You are yourself a priest, and all that you do is a part of your service for God in His holy temple, for God’s temple is not this Tabernacle, nor any other building.

Wherever there is a true heart, there is a temple for God—and wherever there is a renewed heart, there is a priest for God—and that is the only temple and the only priest that God wants, with the exception of the Great High Priest, who stands for us before the throne of the Most High. Well then, whatever you are doing, if you are doing it thus before God, you may ask Him to prosper and establish it. Why not?

When Abraham's servant went down to Padanaram to find a wife for Isaac, he did not say, "This matrimonial arrangement is secular business, so I must not pray about it." But he did pray about it and God guided him and prospered his errand. And David, when he wanted to know whether he should go to certain places to fight his enemies, inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up?" and the Lord gave the answers to his petitions.

We should do well always to make little things as well as great things the objects of prayer. I am afraid that many people fail for lack of due attention to little things. It is not always the great things in which a man slips, but it is often the little things which trip him up. Great matters he naturally takes to God, being diffident of his own judgment, but little matters he decides according to what he considers his own wisdom—and his own wisdom is generally nothing but the most arrant folly.

The Israelites were never so grossly deceived as when the case seemed perfectly clear to them. There were the Gibeonites with old shoes and clouted upon their feet, so it was evident that they must have come from a distant land. They had dry and moldy bread, so no doubt what they said was true, that they had taken it hot out of the oven when they set out on their journey, and it had become moldy from the long distance that they had carried it.

There was no need for the people to call the priest and seek advice from God—the case was so clear that nobody could be deceived. Their own common sense was quite sufficient to guide them—so they said. Had it been a puzzling case, they would have asked the Lord to guide them, but being so very plain, they were deceived, and made a great mistake. Take care to always consult God about those very plain things as you consider them.

Still, beloved, I would be very sorry to see this prayer limited to such matters as these. It should be used concerning them, but it must also be used to higher ends, or else it will be to a large extent wasted. True Christians live for God and work for God—and every one of us who claims to be a Christian is either working for God or else an impostor. I repeat my declaration that the man who calls himself a Christian, and yet does nothing for Christ, is an impostor.

He professes to be a fruit-bearing tree, yet he bears no fruit. He declares himself to be salt, yet he has no savor. He says that he is a light to the world, yet he never helps to remove its darkness by scattering his beams. But every genuine Christian is a worker for Christ, and work done for God is the kind of work which we may ask God to establish, and it is that work which will in the highest sense be established.

What great works men have performed and yet how little has been the length of their endurance! When the great city of Babylon was built, we can scarcely conceive how vast it was, but where is it now? Its site may be known, but its power is gone. Its kings have long since passed away and its glory has departed.

Then there was that mighty city of Nineveh, with all the power which was connected with the Assyrians. Then there was the Persian empire, and the Persian kings with great diligence built up very powerful states—yet they were not established by God, and all the might of Persia melted away. The Romans also built up a vast empire. What a great metropolis they made Rome to be!

As we walk amidst its massive walls, so stupendous that they look as if they must have been the work of giants, we see how the greatest works of men without God are not established. Let them build as solidly as they may, their mightiest works pass away like the child's sandcastles built on the beach that are washed away by the next tide. Nothing that man makes for man will endure.

Build on, you despots, but Time, a mightier king than you, will pull down all that you put up. And the very revolutions of society, as men change from one phase of thought to another, overturn each other—and that which it seemed right to establish yesterday, it seems necessary to overthrow tomorrow. It is not merely empires that are thus cast down, but systems of religion and works that have apparently been done for God have gone too. And schools of thought, that ruled human minds, have passed away, and now they are not—all teaching us that only that which is really done for God—and that which is of God—will be established by God.

This leads me to say that I think the work we may pray God to establish is, first, *the work of soul-winning*, the work of bringing sinners to the Savior. And next, *the work of upbuilding of a church*. And then *the work of testifying to the truth as it is in Jesus*—a work which is sadly neglected in these degenerate times.

The work of soul-saving—when we have earnestly labored to bring sinners to faith in Jesus and have cried to the eternal God for the quickening power of His Holy Spirit to regenerate them—we may certainly pray God that that work may be established.

And then, when we have gathered Christians together, and God has given us grace to put them in their places in His church, and the Holy Spirit has rested upon us so that the work under our hands has been God's work as well as ours—we may certainly pray that God would build up His own church and establish it.

And when we have borne testimony to the truth, we may and we must very earnestly pray that that truth may be spread still more widely, that it may not be forgotten by those who hear it, but may abide in their hearts—and that it may come to the front, and may influence men and women more than it has done hitherto. Thus we may pray that our witness-bearing for Jesus may be established.

I do not know what particular form of service may have fallen to the lot of my dear brethren and sisters here, but in any case, we may pray that what we have done for God may be established—only let us remember that *God will only establish work that is really and truly done for Him*. We can only pray to God, in the language of this prayer, to establish "*the work of our hands*."

There must be real work and it must be two-handed work—we must throw our whole strength into it. I cannot expect God to establish that work over which I have trifled. If I have served God in such a way that it is palpable that I did not think the work very important, I cannot ask Him to establish it. We have a great deal of talking about the Gospel nowadays—we should have the truth spread everywhere if talking would do it—but it is "*the work of our hands*" that is wanted—real service, the putting out of our strength, the using of all our vigor, and wit, and wisdom, and the skill of the craftsman who has been trained to some special form of handiwork.

When a man throws his whole soul into what he has done for the Lord, so that he can claim that the work of his hands is real work done as unto the Lord, then he may ask God to establish it. But it must be work that is truly done, for I am afraid that there is a great deal talked about that is never done.

I am not quite sure about those thirty persons that were said to have been converted the other night at a certain meeting. I cannot always rely upon the information received from a certain brother who goes here and there, and who is quite sure that so many were converted one night, and so many another night. I shall be glad if it is true, but I am not quite clear about it—there is a good deal of "flash in the pan" about his work.

I read, in certain newspapers, of the work done by an earnest brother well-known to some of you—and I tried to find some trace of it, but I could not find any sign of it a few months afterwards. I am sorry to say that I have seen many churches "revived" until there has been nothing left of them. I am very dubious of a great deal that I have heard that seems to me like unholy boasting. If the work was exactly as it was said to be, there ought to have been a very great difference in certain towns from what there is now.

My dear brother, if God has done a great work by you, don't you go and brag about it. If it is needful for you sometimes to tell what the Lord has done in saving souls through your instrumentality, tell it very discreetly, giving God all the glory—not by blowing the trumpet and shouting, "Come and see our zeal for the Lord of hosts," I believe, brings a blight and a blast upon everything that is done.

God the Holy Ghost, must be displeased if we make a boast of any work that is done by us—and He will not establish any work of that sort. The real *bona fide* "work of our hands" God will establish, but He will not establish that which we try to puff into something important by pretty paragraphs in the newspapers about what wonderful things have been performed by us.

The bare truth—plain transparent facts, we may give, but anything like exaggeration should be loathed by the Christian because it is untruthful, and it should be shunned by every wise man because it leads to bitter disappointment. God will only establish work that is really and truly done for Him.

And I believe, further, that *no work is ever really established by God unless it is founded upon the downright truth*. No doubt there is a great deal of work which God acknowledges although all in it is not truth. God prospered the work of Whitefield and the work of Wesley, but did that prove the truth of all that Whitefield or Wesley preached? No, but it proved that both of them had a measure of the truth in their preaching—and that measure of truth God blessed—but God would not establish anything that they taught in error. It may last for a while and some of it has lasted, I am afraid, much longer than is good for us, but it will have to go sooner or later.

There was Luther also—he taught a great deal of truth and that truth will last. But he also taught some error, and the consequence is that there is a great deal today in Lutheranism which is doing much mischief. That will not last—it will have to go the way of all errors. That very point which God will destroy because it is erroneous may be that for which we contend with the greatest vigor.

God will not establish any of His servants' work which is not the truth—and I am sure that every faithful servant of His is glad of that. What a mercy it is, if I do some mischief when I am trying to do my Master's work, that the good work I do will last, but the bad I do, forgiven by His infinite mercy, shall by His great wisdom be swept away ere long!

Error shall not always remain to do mischief—it is the truth that will abide. Hence, I think that we ought never to seek to do good by stating what is not true. There is a great deal of preaching of that which is not the truth in the hope that it will be the means of converting people, but it is of no use. God will establish the truth—but if we keep back any Scriptural doctrines, or if we cut the corners off them in order to make them more acceptable to our hearers—God will not establish our work. He is the God of truth and He will not set His seal to lies.

Hence, beloved, it is so important that *every man, who works for God, should always seek to work in harmony with the Spirit of truth*. We have known some whose guiding star has been "policy." One of these has said, "Suppose I were to leave such and such a church which is in part erroneous—what would become of my work?"

Dear brother, are you going to do a wrong thing in the hope of saving your work? Have you subscribed to that wicked maxim, "Let us do evil that good may come"? After all, what have I to do with the consequences of right actions? Is it not my business, if I have learned any truth, to follow it wherever it will lead me? It will not lead me into a morass, for it is God's light, and it will only lead me into God's way.

If heaven could only stand by a Christian telling a lie, in God's name let it fall, for the ruin of it would be a less calamity than for a true man to turn aside to falsehood. Stand upright and then shall you be as God would have you to be. But the double-minded, the wavering, those that lean first this way and then that, with craft trimming their sails to this wind, and then adjusting them to that, whither will they go? And how can we expect the God of truth ever to establish such "policy" as that? Let our work be true work, done in truth, and with truthful maxims to guide us, for then we may bring it before God and say, "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

Do not try to build too fast, as so many do, using untempered mortar which will not hold their buildings together. Do not try to build beyond or short of the foundation lines which Christ has laid down for you. You would not employ a bricklayer who said to you, "I can get a house up much more quickly than by ordinary methods. I don't need to use the plumb line to see whether the walls are straight or not—I do not trouble about how I put the bricks in the interior of the building. I can leave a blank here and a gap there—nobody will know it. There is no particular need why I should make the bricks fit, the one to the other—as long as I put a good facing on the front, that will do."

Such a man as that may think that he has done well, but when the master comes, he says, “All this has to be cleared away before I can do anything. You have just been doing mischief and you have wasted all the day in which you ought to have worked.”

So, young man, if you go to a church, and want to see it quickly built up, and begin to take unconverted people into membership, or get up a great excitement, and receive a large number of persons without any careful examination, or preach what is not sound doctrine, so that big worldly people in the neighborhood come to hear you, and say, “See how fast he is building”—when the Master comes, He will point out what mischief you have been doing and He will send a better man to do the work. And that better man’s chief trouble will be to get rid of what this fast builder has put up.

Let none of us build like that, but may God give us the grace to build what He can establish, for it is not everything that He can establish consistently with His own character for truth and uprightness.

II. I must not devote more time to that point, but must notice, secondly, and briefly, THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD MAY ANSWER THE PRAYER, “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”

Possibly, *for the establishment of our work, it may be necessary for us to die*. Many a man is, perhaps unconsciously, hindering his own work. And if the work is to be established, it needs somebody else to come and do it. I may again use the very homely simile of a bricklayer.

If he were to say to his master, “Let me finish the house that I have built,” the answer would be, “I do not need you any longer, you have done your part of the work—other workmen must finish the building.” So, sometimes, one good man is like the bricklayer and another good man roofs in what he has built, or does all the work in the interior of the house.

There is a time for all of us to die for the good of our own work, and often, the removal of an eminent Christian man is not the loss to the church of Christ that we think it must be. Perhaps you have seen a great oak tree which has covered quite a large area with its widely-spreading branches—and when it has been cut down, you have all regretted it—it seemed as if there would be a huge gap.

But there were a dozen little oaks that never would have come to anything because they could not get sunshine or rain while they were overshadowed by that great oak. But when that was cut down, all those others began to grow, so that, instead of one tree, you had a dozen.

And the removal of one eminent Christian has often been the means of letting sunlight in to somebody who was obscured before, but who now, in the providence of God, is made strong and useful. So it may be needful for some men to die in order that their own work may be established. If it is so with us, we may well be content to go to heaven so that our prayers may be answered.

But dear brethren and sisters in Christ, there are some very sweet thoughts connected with working for God. *When a soul is saved by our means, our work is established*, for Satan himself cannot undo that work. Death may take that believer away, but that will be the completion of the work. Now the wheat is in the heavenly garner and the precious grain is laid up where no mildew can injure it.

When the work done by good men and women is the means of bringing sinners to Christ, it is sure work. That is gold taken out of the mine which never can rust. Soul-saving work is lasting work and there is this further comfort—that every soul that is truly converted by God’s grace propagates itself. Let one sinner be brought to Jesus and he will bring another sinner. Light one candle and you may light fifty candles from it. One person may be converted to God through your kind, faithful words, and earnest believing prayers—and that one person may bring another, and that one another, and that one another, and that one another, and so on in an endless chain of blessing to God’s glory.

Remember too, that *if we work for God as God wishes us to do, it is really God’s work that we are doing*. He who works truthfully, according to the principles laid down in the Scriptures, has God working in him, and with him, and by him—and all that is God’s work will endure—you may rest assured of that.

What he has done shall not be undone. Divine designs shall not be frustrated, so that we may be sure that the work of our hands, in so far as it is God’s work, will be established. Besides, God is alive to take

care of the work that we do for Him. We die, but He does not. We leave the work in His hands—we could not leave it in better hands. He could have done the work without us, if He had pleased, but although He has been pleased to use us, for a while, He can carry on the work without us when He takes us home.

If you have sought to teach truth for Christ, who is the Truth, to bring souls to Christ, and to build up a church for Christ, God will establish your work. It is true that there are many enemies to the truth—devils and men of devilish spirit who would, if they could, tear down every stone that you have built up—but God shall make the wrath of even these enemies to praise Him, and they shall become, perhaps unconsciously to themselves, the means of establishing your work.

Meanwhile the wheels of providence, [See sermon #3114, God's Providence] which are full of eyes, are grinding on in their majestic course on behalf of the work of God in which you are engaged. And all those eyes are looking onward towards the prosperity of that great cause which is so dear to your heart.

Do not have any fear of failure, beloved—if you have really worked for God, you have worked for a cause that cannot know defeat. It may not win tomorrow, or the next day, but God can wait. Age comes upon us, but nothing shall ever make Him decrepit. And through the course of ages, God can wait.

I always feel, with regard to the causes in which we are engaged, when people tell us that we are in the minority, “Very well, we can be content to be in the minority at present, for the majority will be with us one day. We cannot doubt that when God is with us. Ay, and if we are alone with God, God makes majority enough for all true hearts.

But even counting human heads, the truth shall yet have the majority. God can wait—He knows how to convince gainsayers and bring them round to His side. Our little plans come to a end in a few years—we cannot afford to bring them out unless they do—but God can let His capital lie idle for thousands of years if it is necessary. He is so rich that it does not impoverish Him and He will get His interest by and by.

God can wait and *we must learn to wait too*. That work which produces no visible results at present is none the less a true work and an accepted work. If you teach the truth and die, and that truth appears to be forgotten, you have not lived in vain, for that truth will spring up again in God's good time. They burnt Jerome of Prague. They took John Huss, and when they fastened him to the fatal stake, he said, “You may burn the goose today, but there shall come a swan that you cannot burn”—and that prophecy was fulfilled in Luther, whose crest was a swan.

One good man dies and another comes. If there were not brave men of truth to go down sapping and mining, there would not be other men to come afterwards to be acclaimed victors. In any great movement that succeeds, it is not the last man who deserves the credit—it is the men who went before, at whom perhaps everybody howled.

To be able to hold the truth when everybody tries to hiss you down, and not to care for their opposition, but to feel, “I have God's truth and if all the devils in hell were against me, God is with me, and I am in the majority against them all,” that is the spirit to have, and when we have that spirit, we may pray, “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it,” and it will be done.

It is now some hundreds of years ago that certain believers in Christ were burnt to death upon the very spot on which this Tabernacle now stands. Nearly everybody agreed that they ought to be burnt to death, for they were called Anabaptists, though their belief was as nearly as possible the same as ours. Catholics and Protestants alike said, “Burn them, by all means, for this pestilent sect of Baptists is always testifying against everybody else.” And burnt they were at the Butts at Newington.

Suppose they had said, out of the midst of the fire, “There will one day stand, on this very spot, a great house of prayer wherein about six thousand Baptists shall meet at one time to hear the Gospel preached for which we are being burnt to death”?

Men would have laughed them to scorn. But it has come true, and if I were to say that the last trace of infant sprinkling will be swept from off the earth, and that the last relic of Romanism,

Episcopalianism, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, and heathenism will be swept away, and only be recollected by men to be loathed, I should no doubt be laughed at and disbelieved, but I should be speaking only the truth.

All errors will die in due time. They may live for a while and they may seem to conquer, but God will assuredly pierce them to the heart with His two-edged sword. His despised truth must come to the front, for as surely as God lives, so must His truth live, for it is part of Himself. Be on God's side, I pray you, for that is the winning side.

Be on God's side, old men, and young men also, I charge you, as you shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ—follow the truth. Away with everything but the simple truth revealed in the Scriptures. Put everything else aside and God will establish your work in the ages yet to come. Who knows how long those ages may be? Christ may not come tomorrow—He may wait a while, but He will come one day. We are to live expecting Him to return. Yet peradventure, He may tarry longer than we think—but true work for Him will last until the trumpet of the resurrection shall sound. If the work is of God, it will certainly endure.

I have no time to speak on our third point, WHAT WE OUGHT TO DO IF THIS PRAYER OF MOSES IS OUR PRAYER, but I will say just this. If we want God to establish our work, we must take care not to pull it down ourselves by inconsistent living. We must not imagine that we can establish it by any wrong methods. We must leave God to establish it in His own way—and God often establishes His truth by that which seems likely to throw it down.

If we want God to establish our work, we must pray much about it, and we must do it as His work, and do it for His glory, and do it according to the rules which I have tried to lay down. If I leave only this one thought with you, that the Christian is to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes and to be true to the light which God has given us in this sacred Book, I shall feel that this evening has been well spent.

The Lord grant that all of us may be looking to His work for salvation and then be doing His work, with both our hands and all our heart, and praying God to establish it.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 142

[See sermon #2282, David's Prayer in the Cave]

Verse 1. *I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.*

Silent prayers are often true prayers, but there are times when, in extremity of suffering, it is very helpful to give expression to the soul's agony. I know some friends who can never pray to their own comfort except they can hear their own voices, and I believe that it is a good thing for the most of us to retire to some private place where we cannot be heard by men and where we can therefore freely use our voices in prayer.

Very often, the use of the voice helps to keep the thoughts from wandering and also gives intensity to the desires. You notice that David particularly mentions here that he cried unto the Lord with his voice. No doubt many of his prayers ascended to God from his heart without the medium of his voice, but here the cry with his voice went with the desires of his heart.

2. *I poured out my complaint before him;*

That is a beautiful expression, "I poured out my complaint"—just as you turn a pitcher upside down and let all the contents run out, "I poured out my complaint." We are generally ready enough to do that, only that, usually, we go to some friend, or to some enemy, and pour out our complaint into his ear. But what is the good of doing that? David took a far wiser course, "I poured out my complaint before *him*."

2. *I shewed before him my trouble.*

Uncovered it and set it all out in order before Him. God could see it, yet David knew that it was his place and his privilege to spread it all out before Him.

3. *When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.*

Many of the Lord's saints know the meaning of that sentence, "my spirit was overwhelmed within me." They are like a vessel that has sunk in the sea and is completely covered by the waves. David was in such a plight as that—he did not know his own whereabouts, but here was the mercy, "Then thou knewest my path."

It is much better that God should know our path than that we should know it ourselves, for we may know it and be driven to despair by our knowledge. But God's knowledge of it moves Him to uphold us in it or to deliver us out of it.

3-4. *In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me:*

"They were afraid to link themselves with me, lest, when I went down, like a drowning man, they should be dragged down with me."

4. *Refuge failed me:*

"I could not run away—there was no place where I could find shelter."

4. *No man cared for my soul.*

"They were all hard, cold, ungrateful, treacherous."

5. *I cried unto thee, O LORD:*

What a mercy that David was driven to do that! If there had been any earthly refuge, he would have fled to it. If there had been some human being at his right hand to help him, probably he would have trusted to him. If any man had cared for his soul, peradventure he would have trusted in that person. But now that every earthly door was shut, he was obliged to turn to his God.

5. *I said, thou art my refuge—*

"I can flee to You."

5. *And my portion in the land of the living.*

With both hands he lays hold of God and cries, "Thou art my refuge and my portion"—two glorious "mys." Well did Luther say that the very pith of the Gospel lies in the little words, and it is the same with the Psalms.

6-7. *Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison,*

This is a suitable prayer for those who have troubled consciences, for those who are shut up in Doubting Castle, and cannot get out without divine assistance. "Bring my soul out of prison,"

7. *That I may praise thy name:*

As soon as you are set at liberty, you ought at once to let your glad heart magnify the God who has broken your bonds and brought you out of prison.

7. *The righteous shall compass me about;*

This is a beautiful idea. It seems to imply that they would be so astonished to find him at liberty that they would all come round him to hear his story, they would be so glad to see the mourner rejoicing that they would all begin to inquire what God had done for his soul.

7. *For thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*

In the thirteenth Psalm, David said, "I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." But here he looks into the future and sings, "Thou *shalt* deal bountifully with me."

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.